DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 948 FL 019 387

AUTHOR Oittinen, Riita
TITLE Teaching Translation of Fiction: A Dialogic Point of View.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the First Language International Conference on Teaching, Translating, and Interpreting (Elsinore, Denmark, May 31-June 2, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; Course Descriptions; Educational Strategies; *Fiction; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Holistic Approach; *Interpretive Skills; *Language Processing; *Translation
IDENTIFIERS *University of Tampere (Finland)

ABSTRACT

Some principles and challenges of translation are discussed, and three courses in translation of fiction offered at the University of Tampere (Finland) are described. "Dialogic" principles of translation include: acknowledging that messages are changed in the process of translation, creating a new text; pinpointing the intended purpose of the text in the target language; considering and incorporating literary traditions of each culture; understanding that just as every reading experience constitutes a dialogue between author and reader, the translator is engaged in transmitting his reading experience to others; and creating the new text as a believable whole. The first course is introductory and addresses various issues of genre, purpose, relationship with the author and other involved parties, adaptation versus translation, and dialogic approach. The focus on the second course is translation for publishers. Teaching is individualized, and the course draws on working relationships with publishers of books for children and books by women authors. The third course is a seminar, team-taught, on shorter texts. In all courses, students write about their own translation process, the original author, and their ideas about the story to be translated, and review other students' work. A 19-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED336948

TEACHING TRANSLATION OF FICTION - A DIALOGIC POINT OF VIEW

Riitta Oittinen
University of Tampere, Finland

Author:
Riitta Oittinen
Käräjätörmä 8 A 5
33310 Tampere
Finland

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Oittinen, Riitta.
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL019387

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Riitta Oittinen,
University of Tampere, Finland

TEACHING TRANSLATION OF FICTION - A DIALOGIC POINT OF VIEW

I am a senior lecturer in the translation department of the University of Tampere. In my teaching, I am mainly concentrating on translation of fiction. To describe what I do, I deal first with the "dialogic principles" of translation of fiction, and then, with teaching translation of fiction according to these principles. Here, please, notice that every time I say he, I am referring to both sexes.

In translation, we pay homage to a text in one language by giving it life in another. We do not transfer unchanged messages from English into Finnish, for instance. We recognize and welcome that we are creating something new.

First and foremost, a translation has to function for its purpose in the target language. A translation which is unable to accomplish its function is a poor translation - however "equivalent" it may be. A translation always has a purpose in a certain situation. Participants in this situation include not only the original author, the illustrator, and the translator, but also the readers, publishers, critics as well as time and place, and culture in particular.

In literary translation we must also take into consideration the literary traditions of each culture. These traditions have an effect on how we read and translate, what kind of literature we choose to translate, what kind of literature people choose to read, and what kind of books they choose to buy.

Apart from this, the translator also interprets his readings as an individual. This shows up very clearly in my teaching - even if all the students have the same assignment, translating a picture book, for example, every translation is different. Students always find their own, individual ways to reach their goals. The translator's point of view is influenced by his background, culture, and language. He comes from a certain family, from a certain region; he has studied for a certain profession and he reads certain newspapers. In other words, the translator, like everybody else, belongs to a variety of different interpretive communities, and all these communities influence the way he interprets the world and its linguistic signs.

So in the scheme of things, every living thing is part of a greater whole, and every individual person is always in some kind of a situation. All verbal as well as other communication takes place within a context, within a situation. The situation has an effect on what we mean by our messages and how we understand them, and inevitably, how we read and translate these messages.

This is the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogism, the idea of a living dialogue between people, texts and the world (time, place, culture). Both the written and the spoken word come into being and exist in a dialogue, where different voices meet. According to Bakhtin, every reading experience is dialogic and consists not only of writers, readers and contexts, but also of the past, present, and future: the past and present of the author and the translator, the future of the future readers of the text. Every spoken or written word is directed towards its reader or listener.

Translation, too, is this kind of a dialogic process: the word of the author reaches out towards its readers who all, in different ways and in different situations, contribute to the meanings that arise in the process of reading. Reading is an active experience, and the reader always bears the responsibility for his reading. The translator is also a reader who reads holistically in a dialogic situation.

The American researcher Louise M. Rosenblatt describes reading as transaction between the text and the reader. This idea is close to both Bakhtin's dialogism and the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of horizons that meet and melt in a reading situation, thus creating new meanings.

Rosenblatt's ideas about aesthetic and efferent reading are also very interesting. One important difference between aesthetic and efferent readings is time and experience. In aesthetic reading, the reader's whole attention is attached to the experiences he has *while* reading; on the other hand, in efferent reading, what will happen, "what will be the residue *after* the reading" (1978:23) is important. What kind of information did the reader internalize? What kind of instructions? For instance, when a child is doing his homework or studying for an examination, he pays attention to the facts and tries to learn them - often by heart - to be able to answer his teacher's questions. When reading this way he is most probably reading his books in an efferent, nonaesthetic way. Since the same material could be read in an aesthetic way, Rosenblatt always speaks of different kinds of readings, not different types of texts.

I think this way of describing different kinds of reading may help us to understand how a translator reads. The following example is from my own career as a translator. When translating Amy MacDonald's and Sarah Fox-Davies's *Little Beaver*

and the Echo (*Pikku majava ja kaiku*, 1990), on first reading, I was totally involved in the fascinating world of the little beaver and the beautiful illustrations. Even though I knew that I would be translating this book, for the time being, I forgot my role as a translator. Later on, when I reread the book and started the translation, my attitude changed: I was preparing myself for translating, retelling, the story for Finnish children. Here, my first reading certainly resembled something that Rosenblatt would call aesthetic reading, and the several subsequent readings were certainly closer to what she would call efferent readings.

In my teaching, I always stress the importance of reading. A translator in general, and the translator of fiction in particular, should be a skillful and experienced reader: consistent, observant and analytical. He should also be profoundly sensitive to what he reads, because his reading experience is very important: it forms his idea of the work to be translated. The translator is thus a reader who transmits his reading experience to other readers. But the reader is always responsible, his role entails both rights and duties. This is my first principle of teaching translation: a reader in a situation becomes a translator in a situation.

Translators come up against different problems with different texts in different situations, and I address this fact of life in my teaching. Let us take an example and think about two rather different translation assignments from English into Finnish: a technical translation of the safety instructions for a rubber-tired loader and the translation of *Games at Twilight*, a collection of short stories by the Indian author Anita Desai. The purpose of the safety instructions is to guarantee the safe use of the loader, that is, to make the operator follow, for his own good, the instructions so he

won't hurt himself or ruin the machine. In this case the clarity of the text and the accuracy of the facts are the most important aspects of translation.

In translating the collection of Anita Desai, we faced different problems and asked different questions: What did Desai want to indicate with her occasional use of one-word sentences in a text which was normally written with long and meandering sentences? What might be the meaning of this technique in this particular context? What points of view could we adapt to interpret this textual feature? The importance of the translator as a reader was emphasized here as well; it was now a question of the ability to interpret linguistic and cultural signs and distill them into a solid literary entity. Thus none of the student translators produced "the one and only correct interpretation", but all of them produced a reliable and logical and aesthetically pleasing text. So, in this collection of short stories, we came up with about ten different angles on Desai as a writer from ten different students .

Another important consideration came up, when we were translating Desai's short stories. We had to consider her world as a whole. One of the goals we set was to make the translation credible: to create a consistent world and to picture successfully the colorful everyday life of India.

In this situation, I think my students learned something very important. They learned how to create a believable whole, i.e., an entity whose parts support the whole. They found their voice. A translator must always have an overall vision and a strategy - otherwise he will not succeed. Without a strategy he will be unable to do justice to the original author.

With these ideas in mind, I have developed some special courses for teaching translation of fiction. At the moment, we offer these courses on three different levels: first I give an introductory course on translation of fiction. This course is meant for third year or so students and it includes both lectures and discussion. Together we ponder questions like: What is fiction? How can we define it? How about translating fiction in Finland? How about translating lyrics for a song, a picture book, or drama? What are the demands for readability, rhythm, singability of the translation? What is the role of the translator? How about his relationship with the author of the original, the publisher, the illustrator, the composer, the readers? How does a translator read? How do we create a credible entity? What about adaptations? What is the difference between adaptation and translation? What does it mean when we discuss the dialogic situation of translating? In this context, we dealt with two very different Finnish translations of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* this spring. Reading other people's translations is very important, too.

Following this basic course, we offer an upper level course where our goal is to translate for publishers. Working on real tasks inspires our students. In this course, teaching is, for the most part, individual. So we do not meet as a group in class very often, which makes teaching, and collaboration with publishers, very flexible. At the moment we have working relationships with publishers of books for children and books by women authors, so much of our translation is in these areas. For instance, we have been translating Anita Desai and the American children's author Lee Kingman; these authors are new for Finnish readers. In both of these cases, we introduced our publishers to these authors, so we also find books for our publishers.

We have worked on establishing a productive and mutually beneficial relationship with publishers and editors. Our students also actively search for good texts for translation. I think it is very important, at this stage, to allow students to find literature that they find appealing. This involves students in the process and motivates them to learn and work.

The third course in the sequence on translation of fiction is a seminar. In this course, which I give with a colleague, we mainly discuss shorter texts that students have translated, and here we have found it a bit harder to work on real tasks. This is partly due to the inflexibility of classroom teaching, where we have to meet at certain hours and cannot work according to publishers' deadlines.

In all these courses, students write essays on their own translation process, on the original author and his life, on their own ideas about the stories to be translated, on the problems they come up against, and so on. They also write reviews of each other's work. Along with all the translations for publishers, we also write translator's forewords or afterwords. This is one way to make our readers more aware of the different issues involved in translation. All through the different courses, it is my goal to make the students feel that they are very much part of the process and that they share with me the responsibility for their learning.

Once a student has completed these courses, he may also choose to write a master's thesis on translation of fiction, and along the way, we encourage students to study literature, per se, in other departments.

In all the stages of my teaching, I have several goals, such as combining theory and practice and close collaboration with publishers. If possible, we also

communicate with the authors we translate. For instance, our correspondence with Lee Kingman has been wonderfully rewarding experience. We also try to reach our readers, through newspaper articles, for instance.

I guess in this way my students have learnt to respect the complexities and basic truths of different translation situations. Most of all I hope they learn that all translation, all reading is discussion. Neither reading, nor learning is "a state of passive reception", but a living situation where our different voices meet.

Hanhiemon iloinen lipas. 1954. Translation from the English original *Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes* by Kirsi Kunnas. Illustration by Fedor Rojankovsky. Porvoo: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Translation from the Russian original *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kultura srednevekovia i Renessansa* by Hélène Iswolsky.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1990. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Translation from the Russian original *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist.

Carroll, Lewis. 1981. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*. New York: Bantam Books. Illustrations by John Tenniel.

Carroll, Lewis. 1983. *Liisan seikkailut ihmemaassa*. Translation from the English original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Anni Swan (1906). Porvoo: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö. Illustration by Tove Jansson.

Carroll, Lewis. 1972. *Liisan seikkailut ihmemaassa*. Translation from the English original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Kirsi Kunnas and Eeva-Liisa Manner. Jyväskylä: Gummerus. Illustration by John Tenniel.

Helsingin Sanomat, Kuukausiliite nr 17/May 1991:58-60.

Kuivasmäki, Riitta. 1990. *Siiwollisuuden tuntoa ja ylewätä kauneuden mieltä. Suomenkielinen nuorisokirjallisuus 1851-1899* (A Chaste Mind with a Noble

Longing for Beauty. Finnish-language Children's Literature 1851-1899). Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto. Jyväskylä Studies in the Art 34.

Vaijärvi, Kari. ed. 1982. Lastenkirjallisuuden vuosikirja 1982. Espoo: Lastenkulttuurikustannus Sesam.

Lehtonen, Ulla. 1981. *Lastenkirjallisuus Suomessa 1543-1850* (Children's Literature in Finland 1543-1850) Tampere: Suomen Nuorisokirjallisuuden Instituutti. Suomen Nuorisokirjallisuuden julkaisuja 1.

MacDonald, Amy - Fox-Davies, Sarah. 1990. *Pikku majava ja kaiku*. Helsinki: Lasten Keskus. Translation from the English original *Little Beaver and the Echo* by Riitta Oittinen.

Miller, Alice. 1990. *Banished Knowledge. Facing Childhood Injuries*. New York: Doubleday. Translation from the German original *Das Verbannte Wissen* by Leila Vennewitz.

Miller, Alice. 1990. *For Your Own Good. Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*. New York: The Noonday Press. Translation from the German original *Am Anfang war Erziehung* by Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum.

Oittinen, Riitta. 1987. Kääntäjä ihmemaassa - lastenkirjallisuuden kääntämisestä Carroll-suomennosten valossa (Translator in Wonderland - Translating for Children in Two Finnish Versions of Alice in Wonderland). Pro gradu thesis, University of Tampere.

Oittinen, Riitta. 1988. Lastenkirjallisuuden kääntämisestä lapselle kääntämiseen: autoritaarisuudesta dialogisuuteen (From Translating Children's Literature

towards Translating for Children: From Authoritarianism towards Dialogs. Licentiate Thesis, University of Tampere.

Oittinen, Riitta. 1989. "On Translating for Children: A Finnish Point of View". *Early Child Development and Care* Vol 48:29-37. London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers.

Oittinen, Riitta. 1990. "The Dialogic Relation between Text and Illustration: A Translatological View". *TextConText* 1990/1:40-53.

Robinson, Douglas. 1991. *The Translator's Turn*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rosenblatt, Louise M. 1978. *The Reader, the Text, the Poem. The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.